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# BIRD SURVEYS ALONG THE SANTA CLARA RIVER, 1994 CASTAIC CREEK DOWNSTREAM TO JUST BELOW LAS BRISAS CROSSING

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#### Nature and Scope of Surveys

During the spring and early summer of 1994 a survey was conducted of the section of the Santa Clara River between its confluence with Castaic Creek and a point just below the Las Brisas bridge over the Santa Clara River. The total length of the section surveyed was 7.5 miles. For convenience in surveying, this section was divided into two portions at the Los Angeles - Ventura County line.

Surveys were conducted according to procedures set out in U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service guidelines for Least Bell's Vireo surveys, except that no surveys were conducted in July. All surveys were conducted on foot by observers well acquainted with both visual and auditory patterns of southern California birds. Surveys occurred every other week between April 1 and July 1, except when weather conditions caused some delay, and occurred between 6 and 10 a.m. Because of the width of the river, the north and south sides of the river were walked on alternate surveys. All birds sighted were counted, but special emphasis was placed on finding brown-headed cowbirds and least Eell's vireos as well as other Species of Special Concern. Tapes of territorial calls of Eell's vireos and willow flycatchers were played in areas where no birds of either species were observed or heard. In areas where vireos and flycatchers were heard no tapes were played, and care was taken to not closely approach singing birds so as to cause as little disturbance as possible to these species. Personnel for all surveys were Daniel A. Guthrie, Judith A. Sugden, and Richard F. Clements.

#### Coservations

Bird observations for the two sections of river studied are presented in tables 1 and 2. This section of the Santa Clara River was not regularly surveyed before 1993. Observations were compared to a similar survey, conducted in 1993 and to previous surveys of adjacent sections of the river immediately upstream from this section.

The Santa Clara River experienced heavy flooding during the early spring of 1993 which destroyed much of the wet riparian growth along the river. In 1994 some minor flooding occurred but this did not damage recovering riparian growth. However, an oil pipeline rupture during the winter spilled oil along the whole section of this survey. Gil removal operations involved much bulldozing of the river channel immediately adjacent to the stream. Spring rains made for an excellent growing season and by the beginning of the survey period there was no

evidence of either an oil spill or flooding. Riparian vegetation appeared in excellent condition. The flooding of 1993 created many low areas along the river adjacent to the main channel and these damp areas supported much new growth in wet gravel which by the end of the census period had attained heights of over 6 feet.

Bird numbers observed in 1994 censuses along the river appear very similar to observations in 1993. Numbers of wet riparian species (song sparrow, common yellowthroat, are very similar between the two years as are numbers of species nesting in riparian woodland (chat, yellow warbler, Bewick's and house wren). During late June, numbers of many species increased as young birds fledged, and additional species from coastal sage areas bordering the river began to appear in censuses (phainopepla, lazuli bunting, lark sparrow). Species that utilize the sandbars along the river (killdeer, spotted sandpiper) also were about the same for the two years.

Despite the narrowness of the riparian zone near Las Brisas Crossing, this section of the river is one of the best in terms of avian density and diversity.

## Comments on Species of Special Concern

#### Least Bell's Vireo

Singing least Bell's vireos were heard and observed near the Los Angeles - Ventura County line. A colony of vireos was found in this location in past years. Figure 1, shows the location and dates of all vireo sightings. To avoid disturbance of vireos, the section where vireos were present was surveyed from the top of the bank north of vireo habitat. In accordance with Fish and Wildlife regulations, no tape recordings were played. Therefore, not all birds were observed during every census. However, on several occasions non-singing birds assumed to be females were observed near male birds. A probable maximum of 6 singing males of which 4 had mates were observed at this location.

All vireos in this area were sighted along the northern edge of the wet riparian zone along the Santa Clara River. Vegetation consisted of salt bush, eachharis and willow.

In addition to these sightings, a pair of least Bell's Vireos were observed in June west of this area, as indicated on figure 1. A second pair were observed on the south side of the Santa Clara River approximately 200 yards upstream from the Las Brisas bridge (Fig. 1), also in June.

Brown-headed Cowbirds were regularly observed along all sections of the Santa Clara River, as indicated by census numbers in tables 1 and 2. There appeared to be no greater concentration of cowbirds in the vicinity of least Bell's vireos than along other sections of the river. Cowbirds appeared to regularly patrol the riparian vegetation zone along the river and were often seen flying up and down the river during censuses.

The colony of least Bell's vireos at the County line shows an increase in numbers from last year count of three pair. This increase apparently involves

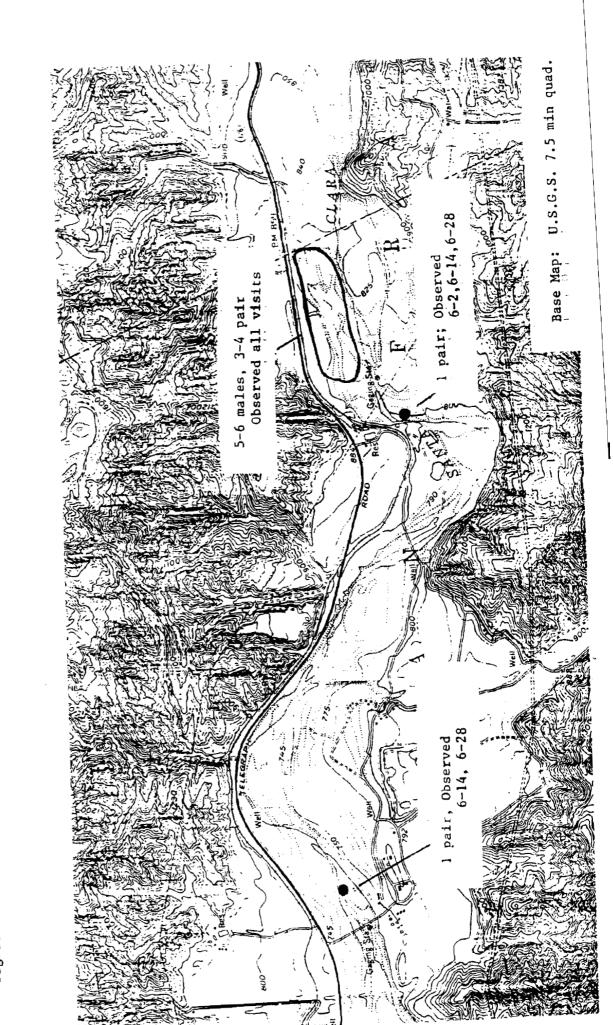


Figure 1. Least Bell's Vireo sightings, 1994,

some recruitment of individuals from other areas. Although no banding has occurred at this lite, at least one and probably more of the birds are banded. This means that they have immigrated to the area from other vireo colonies in Southern California, most likely those downstream along the Santa Clara River.

### Cooper's Hawk

One and possibly two pairs of Cooper's Hawk were present along the river during the census period. Cooper's Hawk is listed as a Species of Concern by the State of California.

## White-tailed Kite

This species (previously called black-shouldered kite) is considered a Special Animal by the State of California. One pair of kites nested along the censused section of the Santa Clara River.

#### Willow Flycatcher

This species is considered a Category 1 Candidate for listing under the Federal Endangered Species Act. Willow flycatchers were once widespread in wet riparian woodland in southern California but now only a few individuals exist in southern California. The main California breeding populations of this species are along the Kern River and in northern California. Individuals of this species that were observed could not be relocated on subsequent visits to the area, suggesting that those observed were migrants passing through the area.

#### Loggerhead Shrike

The loggerhead shrike is a Candidate Species under the Federal Endangered Species Act. A single shrike, observed on May 5th, was probably a bird visiting the riparian zone from nearby coastal sage areas where the species nests.

#### Yellow Warbler

This species is considered a Species of Special Concern by the State of California. Up to 20 pair of Yellow Warblers nested in the wet riparian vegetation along the surveyed section of the Santa Clara River.

## Yellow-breasted Chat

This species is listed as a Species of Special Concern by the State of California. Approximately 15 pair of chats nested along the surveyed section of the Santa Clara River, mostly within Ventura County.

# Summer Tanager

The summer tanager is listed as a Species of Special Concern by the State of California. A single tanager was observed on May 16th. Tanagers nest in riparian woodlands, but given the date, this individual might have been a migrant rather than a summer resident.

Table 1. Bird Observations along the Santa Clara River System, 1994: Santa Clara River from Castaic Creek confluence to Ventura County Line.

Species	date:	4-18	5-5	<u>5-16</u>	6-2	6-14	6-30	Status
Great Elue Hero	n	_	_	_	-	_	_	М
Snowy Egret	•	1	_	_		_	_	M
Green Heron		2	3			1	1	R
Mallard		4	13	4	6	47	5(9)	R R
White-tailed Ki	+o	-	10	2	1		J(J)	R R
	LE	_	_	1	7	-	1	R R
Cooper's Hawk	lane ele	_	_	1	1		4	
Red-shouldered	nawk	_	1	_	1 2	1 2		. R
Red-tailed Hawk	1	-	1	-	2		4 1	R
American Kestre		17	1	~1		-		R
California Quai	r	17	44	21	16	10	32	R
Killdeer		6	16	6	14	16	30	R :
Spotted Sandpip	er		5	-	10	6	11	S.
Common Snipe		_	-			1		M
Domestic Pigeon		2		10	30	2	38	R
Mourning Dove		-	4	13	5	4	5	R
Greater Roadrum	ner	1	-	-	-	2	-	R
Barn Owl			-	-	***	1	-	R
Great Horned Ow.	L	1	-	-	-	~	-	R
Vaux's Swift		20	-	1	-	_	_	М
White-throated &	Swift		-	-	6	2	4	R
Black-ch. Hummin	ngbird	1	-	2	-	1	5	S
Anna's Hummingb:	ird	3	2	4	1	1	10	R
Costa's Humming	oirā	-	1	-	_	_	_	S
Belted Kingfishe	er		1	-	-	_	-	M
Nuttall's Woodpe	ecker	2	6	12	7	8	15	R
Downy Woodpecker	c	2	3	2	1	2	10	R
Hairy Woodpecker		-	-	***	1	-	2	R
Northern Flicker		-	3	2	1	2	5	R
Western Wood Per	vee	1	-	-	-	-	-	М
Willow Flycatche	er	_	_	1	-	_	-	M
Black Phoebe		2	1	_	1	3	11	R
Ash-thr. Flycato	cher	7	16	14	8	7	14	S
Western Kingbird		_	1	1	-	-	-	S
Horned Lark		-	_	2	_	-		R
Purple Martin		_	_		2	_	-	М
Violet-green Swa	allow	8	40	9	14	12	-	M,R?
N. Rough-w. Swal		8	82	2	5	5	30	S
Cliff Swallow		_	150	50	80	70	375	S
Scrub Jay		16	14	6	7	8	11	R
American Crow		8	10	8	9	28	7	R
Common Raven		11	8	6	9	10	12	R
Plain Titmouse		_	6	6	6	13	8	R
Eushtit		6	12	14	10	2	6	R.
Bewick's Wren		25	21	16	12	19	13	R
House wren		6	8	13	4	3	-	R
Western Bluebird	ì	_	2	1	2	5	4	R R
Wrentit	•	2	5	2	6	5	8	R
Calif. Thrasher			2	<u> </u>	_	_	5	R
carrr. Hiragiiet		_	4	_	_	_	ر	T.

Table 1 (cont.). Bird Observations along the Santa Clara River System, 1994: Santa Clara River from Castaic Creek confluence to Ventura County Line.

Species	date:	4-18	5-5	5-16	<u>6–</u> 2	6-14	6 <b>–</b> 30	Status	
-1			7	-					
Phainopepla		<del>-</del>	-		_	1	14	R	
European Starlin	g	4	12	11	7	16	12	R	
Warbling Vireo		-	3	-	-	-	-	M	
Orange-cr. Warble	er	2	_	_		_	-	M	
Yellow Warbler		2	7	7	4	4	-	M,S	
Yellow- r. Warble	er	5	-		-		-	W,M	
Common Yellowthr	oat	6	3	4	5	2	19	R	
Wilson's Warbler		-	6	1	-		-	M	
Yellow-br. Chat		1	4	3	1	-	2 `	S	
Western Tanager		-	2	_	_	-	-	M	
Black-headed Gro	sbeak	7	6	9	10	7	18	S.	
Blue Grosbeak		-	3		2	1	12.	S.	
Lazuli Bunting.			<b>-</b>	-	1		7	ន	
Rufous-sided Towhee		5	11	9	9	9	13	R.	
California Towhee		8	10	4	1	6	17	R	
Song Sparrow		21	20	17	21	17	24	R	
Red-winged Blackbird		10	2	3	27		42	S	
Brewer's Blackbi		ĺ	_		3	-	_	R	
Brown-headed Cow		4	10	8	13	4	25	S	
Northern Oriole			4	_		_	2	s	
House Finch			4	2	~	4	10	R	
Lesser Goldfinch		7	6	24	14	7		R.	
Lawrence's Goldfinch		<i>.</i>		<u></u>	3	<u>.</u>		R	
American Goldfin		10		~ .	_	_	_	W,M	
West sources	<b>⊶1</b> 1	10						** \$2.7	
Total Species:		40	47	42	45	44	45		
Total Individuals	s:	255	594	339	445	377	913		

Total Species on all visits: 72 Total Possible Breeding Species: 52

Status: M - Migrant; R - Resident; S - Summer Only; W - Winter Only

() = Young Birds

Table 2. Bird Observations along the Santa Clara River System, 1994: Santa Clara River from Ventura County Line to Western Limit of Las Brisas Ranch.

Species date:	4-18	<u>5-5</u>	5 <del>-</del> 16	6-2	6-14	6-28	Status
Great Blue Heron	_		_	_	1	1	М
Great Egret	_	_	_	-	_	1	М
Green Heron	_	2	_	1	_	_	R
Bl. cr. Night Heron	_	_	_	1	_ ·	_	R?
Mallard	3	8	9	27	<b>1</b> 1	51	R
Turkey Vulture	<u>.</u>	1	3	_	6		S
White-tailed Kite	1	1	2	1	3	2	R
Cooper's Hawk	_	_	_	ī	ì	_	R
Red-shouldered Hawk	1	2	5	3	3	3	R
Red-tailed Hawk	3	$\bar{\overline{1}}$	2.	_	ī	2.	R
American Kestrel	<del>-</del>	<u>-</u> .	<del>-</del> :		_	ī	R
California Quail	31.	27	31	12	28	8	R
Killdeer	12	15	15	22.	9	16	R
Spotted Sandpiper	1	7	4	10	2	14	S
Common Snipe	_	í	_	-	_		M
Commestic Pigeon	3	-	50	2	4	6	R
Mourning Dove	11	6	16	18	13.	11	R
Common Ground Dove	1	_		1			R
Greater Roadrunner	_	-	1	±.		_	R
Great Horned Owl	1	2(1)		1	1		R
Vaux's Swift	_	9	10	<b>.</b>			M
White-throated Swift		_	<del>-</del>	1	_		R?
Black-ch. Hummingbir		7	4	5		6	S
Anna's Hummingbird	22.	11	16	12	9	12	R
Costa's Hummingbird	22.	2	3	5	2	12	S
Belted Kingfisher	1		1	_		_	M
Acorn Woodpecker	_	_	_		_	1	R
Nuttall's Woodpecker	: 12	11	18	14	16	9	R
Downy Woodpecker	. 12	5	10	5	12	13	R
Hairy Woodpecker	2	1	3	í	3	7	R
Northern Flicker	2	ī	_	_	<b>.</b>		R
Western Wood Pewee	_	_	1	_	_	_	M
	_	2		_	_	_	M
Willow Flycatcher Black Phoebe	3	3	4	6	7	10	R
	22	11	16	11	13	24	S
Ash-thr. Flycatcher						_	
Western Kingbird	1	1	1 95	2 3	2	4	S
Violet-green Swallow		105			40	22	W3
N. Rough-w. Swallow	43	150	64	60	40	32	S
Barn Swallow	200	10	156	200	200	225	M
Cliff Swallow	200	200	156	300	200	225	S
Scrub Jay	12	19	13	21	12	18	R
Awerican Crow	9	44	26	5 11	11	29	R
Common Raven	6	8	8	11	5	14	R
Prain Titmouse	6	8	14	4	28	- 22	R
Bushtit	20	16	26	62	51	26	R
Bewick's Wren	35	26	20	14	27	12	R
House Wren	13	3	29	7	13	-	R
Western Bluebird	2	6	6	4	5	2	R
Swainson's Thrush	_	1	2	2	3	1	S

Table 2 (cont.). Bird Chservations along the Santa Clara River System, 1994: Santa Clara River from Ventura County Line to Western Limit of Las Brisas Ranch.

Species	date:	4-18	<u>5</u> –5	5~16	5 6-2	<u>6</u> –14	6-28	Status
American Robin		2	_	3	3	_	-	R
Wrentit		3	2	6	4	14	15	R
Calif. Thra	asher	4	7	8	6	5	2	R
Loggerhead		_	ĺ	_	_	_	_	Ř.
Phainopepla		_	_	8	5	29	8	R
European St		1	5 <b>6</b>	35	19	29	4	R
Bell's Vire		5	3	4	7	9	3	S
Warbling V		5	4	2	1	_	_	M
Orange-cr.		_	6	2	_	2	1	S
Yellow Wark		6	20	21.	10	4	9	S,M
Yellow-r.		ī	1	_			-	W,M
	rey Warbler	_	1	_				M
Hermit Wark		_	1	_	<b>-</b> ·			M
Common Yell		4	17	30	10	12	5 <b>6</b>	R
Wilson's Wa	arbler	9	28	15	4	-	_	М
Yellow-br.		7	10	15	9	13	10	S
Summer Tana		-	-	1	_	-	_	М
Western Tar		1	3	13	_		_	M
	ed Grosbeak	22	20	17	28	15	26	Š
Biue Grosbe		_	6	3	2	10	7	S
Lazuli Bunt	ing	_	3	7	8	2	18	S
Rufous-side		16	7	18	16	17	11	R
California		12	14	25	15	21	10	R
Chipping Sp	parrow	7	_		_	-	_	M
Lark Sparre		2	_	2	-	_	4	R
Song Sparro		41	88	73	79	46	62	* R
Lincoln's S	parrow	1	-	_	_	_	_	М
White-cr. S		3	_	_	_	_	_	W,M
Red-winged		8	19	12	15	7	7	S
Brewer's B	L <b>ack</b> birā	-	_	-	1	-	-	R
Brown-heade	ed Cowbird	24	58	47	41	11	47	S
Hooded Cric	ole	1	4	5	3	-	5	S
Northern Or	riole	6	-	7	4	9	10	S
House Finch		18	2	26	13	28	10	R
Lesser Gold	dfinch	35	13	22	18	61	22	R
American Go	oldfinch	16	-	2	-	-	-	W,M
House Sparr	OW	14	-	10	4	3	6	R
Total Speci	.es:	5 <b>9</b>	63	65	60	53	54	
Total Indiv		787	1128	1125	980	889	902	

Total Species on all visits: 86 Total Probable Breeding Species: 55

Status: M - Migrant; R - Resident; S - Summer Only; W - Winter Only

() = Young Birds